

Democratization and National Integration in Nigeria

Martin Ikechukwu Ifeanacho*

***Abstract:** Nigeria has been democratizing since 1975. Democratization is closely associated with the enabling environment for political integration and development. Paradoxically, the history of democratization in Africa, Nigeria in particular has remained the history of national disintegration. In this paper we have situated the paradox within the colonial hegemonic legacies and their imperatives for the indigenous ruling class that must necessarily contented with a weak economic base by using the instruments of the state to acquire surplus. Simultaneously the same ruling class makes pretences at democratizing. We therefore posit that power has to transit from the ruling class to civil society for true democratization to emerge.*

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's efforts at achieving national integration have remained largely unrealized. The integration crisis facing Nigeria is manifest in the minority question, religious conflicts, ethnic politics, resource control youth restiveness and the call for a sovereign national conference. These have jointly generated the disintegration of the productive sector, and the institution of food insecurity, social in-security, deterioration of the physical and social infrastructures, fall in the living standards of a vast majority of Nigerians and their alienation from the political system.

The entire social matrix in Nigeria is characterized by inter community/intra-community, inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic, inter-religious and intra-religious strife. Some of these conflicts are as old as the history of the Nigerian nation. Armed quasi militia youths have been combating detachments of the Nigeria army in the Niger Delta region. On Tuesday May 4th 2004, Yelwaq in Bauchi state was turned into a theatre of death and horror as Christians battled Muslims. The inferno quickly spread to Kano where more lives and property were destroyed. This orgy of violence has become a permanent feature in the northern states. The influenza is threatening to penetrate the East in the form of reappraisal attacks on Muslims. The magnitude of the problem caused president Obasango to declare a state of emergency in the plateau state.

Most of the socio-political problems which are threatening the foundations of the Nigeria nation have lingered through the ages. For instance, the chiefs of the people of the Niger Delta region protested the exploitation of the resources in the area in 1899. Kuka M.H. (2000) has stated that the current discussion about Sharia is 95% about power and perhaps about 5% about religion. He related this current

* Department of Sociology, University of Port Harcourt

resuscitated quest for power to the Anglo-Fulani hegemony established in 1903 after the British overran the Sokoto caliphate. Ethnic anxieties are also as old as the nation itself.

The contradictions of the conflicts and anxieties fuelled by these problems have culminated in a major civil war, several military coups, fragile attempts at democratizing, religious, ethnic and tribal crises, and the rise of ethnic militias. Civil society in Nigeria through all these processes has been subjected to considerable pain, anxiety, fatalism, poverty, cynicism, frustration and disillusionments. Recently Enahoro identified “justice and fair-play” as two elements that could ensure Nigeria as an indivisible whole. He added, “with flagrant abuses of the judiciary and other organs of the state, our future is unpredictable” (cited by Lawrence B. in FORUM TEL No. 21 may 2004:56).

Democratization has been closely associated with national integration. Recent surveys of ethno nations conflicts around the world, cited in Kynlicks (1999:185), contend that self government arrangement diminish the likelihood of evident conflict, while refusing of rescinding self-government rights, is likely to escalate the level of conflicts. Babawale (2000) made this same point when he argued that political liberalization allows for open expression of dissent even in unusual forms, for him, the beauty of a democratic environment is that it allows for a negotiated resolution of conflicts either ethnic or otherwise. Ake (cited in Kukah 2000:1) portrayed the beauty of democracy by contrasting it with the military. He emphasized that:

The military addresses the extreme and the extraordinary while democracy addresses the routine, the military values discipline and hierarchy, democracy values freedom and equality, the military is oriented to law and order while democracy to diversity, contradictions and competitions, the method of the military is violent aggression, that of democracy persuasion, negotiation and consensus building.

It is a fact that the military has dominated Nigerian politics since 1960. It is also true that Minorities Commission listened to all Nigerians grievances forty years ago. More striking is the civil war that was fought to keep Nigeria one over thirty years ago. Then followed the several democratization experiments which midwifed three republics. Most recently Nigeria embarked on yet another democratizing experiment that supposedly marked the end of military rule in Nigeria on May 29, 1999. Yet there is no end the shades of crises which have rendered the Nigerian democracy palpable. While the Uba- Ngige saga in Anambra state; the rise of ethnic militia in all the geo-political regions, the assassination of key political players, the alleged Mustapha led coup etc represent the socio-political perspective on the crisis of democratization, the declaration for Sharia and the spate of religion motivated attacks portend the religious version of the crisis.

Several questions become pertinent at point. For instance, why has democratization not signalled the end of militarism in Nigeria? Why are we still far away from freedom and equality? Why has cultural diversity continued to be a burden on national integration? Why is it still extremely difficult to define, in primary terms, the meaning of indigeneship in Nigeria? Why are Nigerians members of minorities that do not constitute any form of majority?. What are the factors militating against the use of persuasion, negotiation

and consensus building for national integration? Is Nigeria really democratizing? Does Nigeria still need the Sovereign National Conference (SNC), true federalism, and restructuring?

We will adopt the historical materialism approach to relate the democratization process to the hegemony of the ruling class which has converted the entire political system in Nigeria into a mechanism for extracting surplus from civil society. Part of the contradictions of this process is that civil society should necessarily be balkanized by the same ruling class minding democratic structures to avoid any broad-based civil resistance.

DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

Legitimacy and Authority

Authority is power based on general agreement; (1) that a person or group has the right to certain sorts of commands (2) that those commands should be obeyed (Shively 2003:47). It therefore implies that persons who fail to obey the commands of government are participating in socially unacceptable behaviour. This is why authority is backed up by persuasion and threat of coercion.

Legitimacy is closely related to authority. If authority exists because it is generally agreed "on" the person/s exercising authority shall expect obedience by those to whom the commands apply. It is crucial to a government that large numbers of its people should believe that it has authority and that it properly should have that authority. We call the existence of this sort of feeling to the extent that it does exist, the legitimacy of the government (Shively 2003:147). It is important to note the word properly because a government that rigs itself into power may not be deemed to properly have authority. This may prevent the government from achieving a reasonable degree of legitimacy.

Democracy

When we refer to Nigeria's political system as "Nascent democracy", we input that democracy is new in Nigeria. This is erroneous. The term democracy may be more closely associated with Western political thought, its varying connotations have global application. Literally, democracy signifies "the rule of the people". Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy is close to its literal meaning. It reads: democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people (Guaba 2005:421). The simplicity of the definition does not do justice to the extremely controversial notions of the concept.

Guaba (2005:440-460) provides an array of interpretations of democracy beginning with elitist version typified by Mannheim who argued that the people cannot directly participate in government, but they can make their aspirations felt in certain intervals. And this is sufficient for democracy. The pluralist version

finds expression in Dahl's interpretation who insists that: the policy making process, however centralized it may appear in form, is in reality, a highly decentralized process of bargaining among relatively autonomous groups. There is yet the participatory theory of democracy. McPherson, its major apostle conceptualizes democracy as the active involvement of individuals and groups in the government processes affecting their lives.

There are certain principles which are implied in the different interpretations. For instance (a) Government by consent (b) Public accountability (c) Majority rule (d) Recognition of minority rights; (e) Constitutional government (f) Freedom of association (g) Existence of opposition ; and (h) The upholding of civil liberty and rights. Democracy therefore can at best be said to be relative. Traditional Igbo society was democratic and contrasted significantly to the Hausa-Fulani and Oduduwa kingdom where power was centralized. Turning to contemporary Nigeria, we face the dilemma of fitting current political practices into existing theories of democracy.

McPherson (in Guaba 2005:460) opined that third world countries, which have no experience of Western individualism, could also conform to the ideals of some historical theories of democracy as far as their governments are legitimized by mass enthusiasm. What exactly does McPherson mean by mass enthusiasm? The hounding of civil society into rallies? The 1 to 10 million man march? Solidarity rallies? The market women's march to Government House to plead with Mr.A. to run for a particular position? Discussion on which of the retired Generals is more qualified to rule? Seriously speaking we are of the view that McPherson's assertion accounts for the way and manner the ruling class contrive the role of members of civil society in a democratic setting.

Democratization

Democratization is more difficult to pin down than democracy. It is easy to note that the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 signaled a resurgence of democracy. We could go further to point at such countries as Ecuador and Peru in 1978, Bolivia in 1982, Argentina in 1983, Chile in 1989, Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia between 1989 and 1991 and posit that the exit of the military in politics amounted to democratization. This could be misleading. After establishing democracy in Algeria, the military was afraid that the fundamentalist Islamic party would be victorious, and it abruptly banned elections in 1992 (Shively 2003:470). This shows that democratization does not simply connote change of government. It goes beyond the organization of political parties and elections.

Democratization is more appropriately viewed as the institutionalization of democratic principles as part of everyday culture in a society. It finds expression in the channeling of behavioural patterns towards democratic ideals. It permeates all facets of community life from religion through the economy, marriage,

family to politics. These institutions legitimize the activities of those who exercise authority. If these institutions are absent militarism might be misconstrued for democratization.

Colonialism and National Integration

The problem of national integration in Nigeria is not remarkably different from that of most of the nations that were colonized in Africa. The constitutional changes introduced by the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria after the 1988 crisis were designed to accommodate multipartism. Yet cancellation of democratic elections imposition of "high security councils" led by military men, religiously motivated attacks particularly on Islamic Salvation Front (FTS), violence and heightening of terror, massacres and political trauma have trailed the nations history. The military in Algeria has since 1992, appointed and removed four presidents namely Chedli Benyedid Mohammed Boudiaf, Alikhaf and Liamanine, Zeroual (the Guardian Friday, may 1999:16).

Ghana's political history since independence has been as checkered as that of Algeria. Ghana registered her first military coup in 1966 and a second in 1976. By 1993, Ghana has experienced four republics and several periods of military rule. What characterized both military and democratic experiments were imposition of authoritarian rule, accompanied by rhetorical/espousals of popular participation and the empowerment of the down trodden (see Gyimah-Boadi 1994). This pattern of clinically manipulated attempts at democratization of authoritarianism has been noted in other countries such as Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Congo, and others.

Nigeria was not spared this path to political development as the process of decolonization was the same as the cited examples above. The Nigeria elite who were groomed by the colonial masters accepted modernization as development and displayed unbridled enthusiasm in importing Western values, institutions, technology manpower and policies. It was for this particular reason that it failed to institute an indigenous and independent economic base. Consequently, the transition from colonialism to independence made little economic sense because the vestiges of the colonial economy were left intact and transferred to the post-colonial political era.

The British had in 1899 revoked the charter of the Royal Niger Company. By 1914, it completed the process of bringing together several hundreds of ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups and communities which then had attained different levels of economic and political development. These strategies produced a state structure that was to become the servant of imperialism and all those metropolitan interests which owed their existence to the continuance of imperialism (Ekekwe 1986:26). This state structure did not necessarily emphasize integration. Rather it encouraged specialized regional production to meet the needs of the metropolitan economy. Shively (2003:62) noted this when he observed that Nigeria, like most colonies, was not constructed for internal coherence but rather for the administrative

convenience of the British. With such a balkanized social formation, the state assumed the status of a supreme institution that was capable of intervening, forcefully in most cases in the three major regions i.e., the North, South and West

The Nigeria ruling class inherited this state structure without any form of modification or moderation. They rather became so preoccupied with the use of the state paraphernalia for accumulating surplus without through the processes of producing surplus. The resultant contradiction was an institutionalized myopic and visionless ethnic centered leadership with separatist and particularistic political outlook (Nnoli 1979). Such a ruling class can hardly engineer democracy. It must compulsorily strive to consolidate its economic base. Ake (1981:145) acknowledged this when he observed:

So we have indigenous leaders who are in political offices but with little economic base. This contradiction between economic and political power becomes a source of further interesting development as the rulers try to use the only tool they have, political power, to create an economic base in order to consolidate their economic power.

The use of political to capture economic surplus has had the peculiar effect of heating up the political system and marginalizing civil society economically. These were the exact processes which led to the collapse of the first republic. The civil society in the West registered its dissatisfaction with federal elections in 1965 by refusing to pay taxes, thus depleting government revenue. The government recourse to skimming off the surplus which accrued to cocoa farmers with devastating consequences. As Dudley (1982:73) notes:

The first act of the new government was thus to cut the price paid to the farmer from £110 per ton of cocoa to £60, but in thus almost halving the income of the farmers the government opened the floodgates for violence and revolt.

The violence and revolts which ensued quickly spread from the rural areas to the urban centers. The anarchy completely eroded the legitimacy of the state and gave impetus to the five young army majors who led the first military coup in Nigeria in 1966.

The collapse of the first republic demonstrated clearly the inability of the Nigerian elite to integrate Nigeria. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) which dominated the federal government lacked legitimacy in the West and so could not restore social order within the West. Furthermore the Nigeria National Democratic Party which won the elections in the West equally lacked legitimacy in the area as a result of the manner in which the elections were won and lost. The Deputy Leader of the NNPP and also Deputy Premier of the West, had in fact said before the elections that whether the electorate voted for the NNPP or not, NNPP would win the elections. (Dudley 1982:72). This is basically the tragedy of the Nigeria democratic system. It operates over and above members of civil society. At the same time, it raises serious legitimacy crisis for the state and creates a big gap between the ordinary Nigerians and their leaders. This is the gap the military has pretended to fill.

The Single versus the Military System

Nigeria has been transiting from a military state to a democratic social formation since 1975. General Murtala Mohammed kick-started the process by setting up a Constitution Drafting Committee charged with engineering:

A free democratic and lawful system of government which guarantees fundamental human rights; a stable system of government through constitutional law; public accountability; elimination of over-centralization of power in a few hands; and as a matter of principles, decentralize power wherever possible as a means of diffusing tension (Ake 1994:9-10).

Many African countries shared these commendable political goals. They equally placed much premium on the potentials of the multi-party system for achieving them. The basic assumption was that the multiplicity of political parties in the end will determine the success or failure of democratic experiments. Thus the history of democratization has been the history of transition from the single party system to the multiparty election system in Kenya, Cameroon, Zambia, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria etc.

Ironically the experiments were manipulated by the same elite controlling a state structure basically designed to encourage authoritarianism to the detriment of consensus building. Political pluralism is a mirage in Africa, Nigeria in particular. The hegemony of the ruling class supercedes it. From 1983 to 1999, Nigeria was ruled almost continuously by the military. Generally the military teased the public with promises of democracy while continually delaying its implementation (Shively 2003:63). The democratizing attempts by generals Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha and Alhaji Shehu Shagari illustrate this. All the democratic experiments were characterized by intra-class conflicts which were often elevated to national issues such as, lack of clearly defined ideological differences between the competing political parties, and a tacit agreement by members of the elite to compete within the existing state structure. This of course rendered every democratizing experiment an attempt to devise a new way of democratizing the one party system. This clearly manifested the dictatorship of the ruling class, who do not necessarily belong to a single political party. Dudley (1982:196) has observed that political beliefs (within the ruling class) are characterized more by their fluidity than by any consistence with which they are adhered to. Certainly for the political leadership, political beliefs are more a matter of convenience than one of commitment. The convenience is commitment. The convenience is determined by the individual economic interest of the politicians who strategically position and reposition themselves in anticipation of spoils of converted political position. It is for this reason that Ake (1994:8) posited that in most of Africa, state power is constituted in such a way as to render democracy impossible. There may be as much political pluralism as we presently have in Nigeria yet it hardly translates to a matter of choice for civil society. Presently it is either the Peoples Democratic Party or PDP for most Nigerians.

The major factor underlying this interventionist and coercive state structure in Nigeria is the centrality of the state in the distribution of surplus in Nigeria. The state plays the central role of determining the distribution of financial resources in the forms of loans, contracts and revenue from oil; thus accumulation with state power is the norm for members of the political class. Power and wealth are fused together and the premium for political power is therefore very high (see Turner 1976, and Ihonvbere 1989).

The major thrust of the economic policies pursued by the elite lends credence to the above assertions. The indigenization programme was aimed at increasing indigenous ownership of capital in Nigeria. The policy created ample opportunities for the elite to acquire increased control over surplus generated in the country. The austerity measures which followed enabled the elite maintain levels of profit by cutting down labour. The Structural Adjustment Programme followed and further entrenched the gains of the austerity measures for the elite. In Nigeria SAP dotted the socio-political terrain with wage freeze, roll back of subsidies, rise in unemployment, wide spread disillusionment, despair, poverty and malnutrition. The sense in, and gains of SAP were euphorically chronicled by the elite and their chorines in academics. They were at every stage confronted by the fact that for the vast majority of the people in Nigeria the primary issues remained poverty, food, employment, basic medicare, education and transport.

These are usually converted to electoral promises by civilians or used to rationalize coups by the military. Which ever, the insincerity of purpose crystallizes sooner or latter and precipitates mass democratic agitations. The operators of the state civilian and military usually resort to violent repression as a response to these agitations. The massacre of Bakolori peasants during Shagari's civilian regime, the arbitrariness of Buhari/Idiagbon and the killing of Nigerians in their hundreds during agitations under Babangida and Abacha demonstrate high handedness in the use of security apparatus for repressive ends in Nigeria (see Odion Akhaine 2002).

The Yorubas say "a drum sounds loudest just before it breaks" this does not seem to be true in relation to undue insensitivity of the operatives of the state apparatus towards democratization and national disintegration in Nigeria. The contradictions which have been exhumed by the false starts have not constituted any lessons for the elite. The empirical evidence of this can be deduced from the current "CARRY GO" democracy in Nigeria.

Carry Go Democracy

Ake insists that the grammar of politics which is central to the solidarity and identity of the political community is an instrument of inclusion and unity as well as exclusion and disunity (1994:15). This is very true of the concept of carry go democracy in Nigeria. The concept "Carry Go" was made prominent during Abacha's military regime by motor –park touts (Agbero).

The government had decided that motor parks should be rid of touts. The touts were accused of increasing the cost of transportation by imposing charges on drivers for loading their vehicles. The touts, "agberos" solicit for travelers by shouting out the destinations of the vehicles thereby enabling travelers to locate and board vehicles. The drivers of the vehicles usually rest in small kiosks while the agberos coerce travelers into sitting arrangements that are far from comfortable, charge and collect fares from the passengers and hand over to the drivers in kiosks. The drivers thereafter, board the vehicles and drive off.

A combined team of military and civil police battled with the agberos for a few weeks. It finally dawned on the government that the task was impossible. After a few weeks of inactivity, the agberos resurfaced in motor parks with invigorated dexterity. They will load the vehicles, charge and collect fares and pocket their commissions. The final ritual will be a big bang, using their hands on the vehicle and simultaneously shouting "Carry Go" "No shaking", "NO YAWA" obviously referring to the drivers of the vehicles. For the touts, this was the shout of victory and a celebration of their ability to stand a face-off with a repressive military regime.

A sociological analysis of this motor-park politics illustrates a few things about democratization in Nigeria. The travelers were called to vehicles, offered seats and told the prevailing fares. They bargained with agbero's and finally paid to them. The social contract was between the agberos and travelers. The agberos stay in the parks while the driver and passengers who do not have much in common embark on the journeys.

Frequently, the vehicles break down half way through the journey giving rise to paradoxical situations. The travelers will want their fares back. But they did not pay to the drivers. The agberos collected money from them. The agberos by this time, will be busy loading other vehicles in the parks. Gradually the travelers will devise individual coping strategies to complete the journey. Indeed some drivers use this strategy to stop halfway pretending that the vehicles are out of order. Once the passengers are gone they will return to the parks, and load again.

Ordinary Nigerians have been short-changed just like the passengers above. In his concept of the social contract Jean-Jaques Reousseau postulated that sovereignty not only originates in the people, it continues to stay with the people in the civil society Sovereignty cannot be represented government shall be constantly accountable to the people for fulfilling the instructions of the general will. By the illustrations above the agberos institute a social contract and thereafter substitute themselves with drivers. In the same manner, restive youths, hooligans and political touts institute social contracts with civil society and substitute themselves with "big men" who provide the funds. There is no social contract

binding the office holders to civil society. Public accountability is therefore not tenable. Nigerian politicians compete among themselves using youth militias. These gangs organize political rallies at which promises are made. At the end, there is a massive chorus of "CARRY GO" "NO SHAKING" "NO KAI". Thereafter the gangs rig the elections, threaten and silence people who question the "free and fair" elections and celebrate electoral victories for their sponsors who only emerge as occupants of sensitive political positions. The politicians who emerge know very well that they captured state power without the consent of the people.

If there is any form of social contract, it is between the restive youth gangs and the rest of civil society. The judiciary has no place in this form of social contract. It is regularly informed that major political crises are mere family problems that the party can resolve, be it in Anambra, Abia Imo, Delta or Bauchi State. The fact remains that the euphoria with which Nigerians welcomed the 1999 "very peaceful elections" as the end of militarism in Nigeria politics has evaporated as the state intensifies the processes of accumulation through deregulation and privatization. Once more this has clearly demonstrated the economic essence of political contraptions of the Nigeria ruling class.

A more critical examination of deregulation for instance, reveals that is an extended version of indigenization, austerity measures, SAP, and now privatization. The mopping up of surplus has developed from very subtle to more aggressive techniques. Thus the poverty level continues to gravitate between 65.6 percent in 1996 and 75 percent in 2000. A World Bank report titled World Bank Atlas, says Nigeria is the 21st poorest nation whose gross national product (GNP) is \$300. Privatization in such a country will only increase the gains of the power elite and correspondently reduce the gains of the masses that are poor.

It is therefore pertinent to emphasize that the current democratization experiment is merely a change in techniques adopted by the elite in Nigeria to entrench the economic interests of metropolitan an indigenous capital. Privatization has intensified this process and resulted in the severe economic marginalization of the urban an rural poor. Kokah (2000:10) observes that:

It is against this background, Nigeria and Nigerians must situate the outgoing confusions in the explosions of cross cutting ethic tensions, violent cultural resurgence, negative atavism ethnic belligerence, religious begottery. What passes for democracy seems to have given us licence to take the law unto our hands. Unleash on one another prejudice which our cowardice have battled for so long.

The forgoing clearly shows that democratization managed by the power elite in Nigeria is anti democratic, very repressive and highly divisive. It corrodes the tenets by consensus building and sets in motion such dangerous whirlwind that forces society to degenerate to dangerous levels of breakdown of law and order. This triggers the adoption of varying coping strategies by those who democratize authoritarianism and the civil society. Thus religious and ethnic crises, traditional patron-client relations, youth restiveness, excessive commoditization of relations, all configurate to deny Nigerians any prospects of sharing their

universality of democratic consensus building and in the collective enterprises of asserting a corporate identity.

CONCLUDING REMARK

We have sustained the thesis that the fundamental problem of democratization in Nigeria stems from a state structure designed to extract surplus and suppress agitation from civil society during colonialism. This same structure has been retained by the power elite. The dynamics of this state has continued to necessitate concessions and reforms in techniques used for achieving the same old goal, living civil society traumatized.

There are therefore no prospects in any National Sovereign Conference orchestrated under the same state structure. It will simply transform into another "Carry Go" conference. There is equally no prospects in re-structuring the nation into many geo-political zones while retaining this faulty state structure. Nigeria will be merely exchanging expanded party pluralism and formal access to democratic participation for intensified economic disempowerment thus setting the stage for more vicious cycle of violence and national disintegration. What is required in Nigeria is true democratization of culture. Power must be handed over to civil society in Nigeria. Alternatively civil society must retrieve power from the power elite so as to determine the political processes that will evolve a legitimate state in Nigeria. Thereafter autonomous communities will produce representative to a "true national sovereign conference" that will bestow on Nigeria an identity, a spirit and, a focus. Such a conference will:

Ensure democratic participation in decision making, such that the needs of people will receive high priorities and be made the targets of policy. It will empower people from below and make transformation a self development a self process. (Tomor in Onimode and Singe (eds) 1995:245).

Currently, democratization is aimed at economic development determined by the power elite whose only obligation to civil society is explanations. This is basically why the Nigerian society approximates a society in disarray. Nigerians hate each other, they fear each other, they do not know each other because they cannot communicate with each other. They are separated strategically by a power elite that arrogates powers to itself and exercises and retains such power by upholding the principle of divided and conquer.

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